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SUBJECT: NEA SENIOR ADVISOR WALSH'S VISIT TO MOROCCO

1. Summary: On May 27, NEA Senior Advisor and MEPI Women's Pillar Manager Elizabeth Erin Walsh visited Morocco to discuss MEPI Programs with Post and MEPI implementers. Contacts gave an overview of the women's movement in Morocco and recommendations for next steps, particularly the need to include economic empowerment programming. Walsh learned of problematic program management issues related to the World Learning project. Post is moving forward with Walsh's suggestion to create a MEPI Women's Pillar committee. End Summary.

2. Over breakfast at the Ambassador's residence, senior Mission staff briefed visiting NEA Senior Advisor and MEPI Women's Pillar Manager Elizabeth Erin Walsh on the full range of MEPI projects in Morocco and described in detail the coordinating structure established by the Ambassador to manage MEPI programs. USAID Country Director Monica Stein-Olson provided an update on USAID's branding policy and recent steps to enhance coordination with the Embassy on the management of MEPI programs. The Ambassador and DCM stressed that Post had long ago revamped its management, staffing, overall assistance package, and Mission Program Plan process to bring them into alignment with MEPI priorities and objectives. Walsh strongly encouraged Post management to establish a separate subcommittee for Women's Pillar programs (Note: Women's issues are currently managed by Post's Democracy Pillar Subcommittee. Post will enact Walsh's recommendation shortly. End Note).

3. Walsh met with Zineb Benjelloun, the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Counselor for the Maghreb. Benjelloun described the history of the women's movement in Morocco, from its nascent days when independent women's rights groups broke away from political parties to its influence and involvement on the Royal Commission that eventually developed the Moudawana (family) code reforms enacted in 2004. UNIFEM had discreetly supported these efforts through first legal literacy training and then "legal religious literacy" training. UNIFEM's approach has been to assist with a communication strategy so that women's groups could influence and motivate the "closed process" that resulted from early demonstrations against family code reforms. Benjelloun provided Walsh with a copy of a UNIFEM-sponsored publication (done in conjunction with Collectif 95 Maghreb Equalite), "Manual for Equality in the Maghreb," which contains 100 measures of women's empowerment. UNIFEM has now shifted its focus to supporting implementation of the new family code, including promoting programs on communication, awareness training, and mass media. Benjelloun estimated that there were about 20 to 25 effective women's NGOs in Morocco, but was highly optimistic about smaller NGOs emerging in the regions. Looking forward, Benjelloun recommended that MEPI investigate assisting women in the region with economic empowerment, characterizing it as the missing piece from previous efforts and a linchpin of the overall effort to better the lives of women.

4. Walsh and Poloff visited the offices of World Learning and met with Project Director Rachida Afilal. Afilal described World Learning's three distinct program's under their USD 777,000 MEPI SPA grant: activities initiated by the Rabat Office, programs developed with partner NGOs in four regions of Morocco, and a subgrants program with seven different NGOs. While enthusiastic about the initiatives, Afilal expressed frustration with some aspects of the program's management, particularly the level of support and coordination she had received from World Learning headquarters. Noting that the original proposal of 18 months was reduced to 12 months, she had requested a no-cost extension from World Learning but had not received a reply. In addition, World Learning had not transferred grant payments in a timely manner, leading Afilal to forgo two months salary to meet operating costs such as rent. The payment situation had also led to delays in the subgrant programs, a situation further complicated by the need for her staff to translate the grants agreements. Walsh expressed concern that the situation was having a negative effect on the subgrantees' view of MEPI and promised to investigate once she returned to Washington.

5. Over lunch, Walsh and Poloffs met with representatives of the American Bar Association (ABA). ABA is in Morocco on both USAID-Administered MEPI and DRL-funded grants. Richard

Paton, ABA's Regional Director, and Martha Dye, Manager of ABA's Women and Law Program, described ABA's projects in Morocco, particularly on the training of family court judges. Paton and Dye also offered suggestions and views on future MEPI Women's Pillar Programs in the legal sphere, noting in particular that increasing training programs for family court judges could be an effective area for further U.S. assistance.

16. During a visit to the offices of TANMIA, Executive Director Karl Stanzick described the NGO's efforts to create a virtual space for Moroccan NGOs on the internet. The TANMIA website, partially funded by a MEPI SPA grant, allows NGOs to share information on programs and opportunities and exchange best practices. The website's features include moderated discussion boards and pages for posting announcements and offers of employment. TANMIA is now looking at sustainability methods such as advertising, sponsorship, and fee for service arrangements. TANMIA will also open approximately five regional service centers by the end of June. The service centers will provide internet access to NGOs in remote regions. Stanzick noted that the webportal had in fact given smaller, rural NGOs the ability to compete with the larger established NGOs in the Rabat-Casablanca corridor.

17. Finally, Association Joussour briefed Walsh on the results and impact of their highly successful Moudawana Theater project, funded partially through a MEPI Small Grant and recently featured in MEPI RO Tunis' Newsletter. MEPI funding allowed Joussour to expand their performances and discussion sessions to 12 additional venues (which were in rural areas at Post's recommendation). Audiences averaged 100 to 400 people and while dominated by women also had a good mix of children and men. Joussour was somewhat disappointed at the turnout of working women and would like to target that segment in future programs. Joussour representatives told Walsh that they are eager to apply for follow-on MEPI funding to continue the Moudawana theater initiative and are looking at other possibilities for increasing their efforts. They are now investigating developing proposals to re-energize a women's counseling center in Rabat's medina that is now dormant due to lack of funding, job training projects, television programs, legal literacy training, and expanding the Moudawana theater abroad. Walsh encouraged the dynamic leaders of Association Joussour to continue to refine and develop their proposals and in particular to focus on ways to expand the play.

18. NEA SA Walsh did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before her departure from Morocco.
RILEY